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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 001333

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STATE FOR EAP/MLS; PACOM FOR FPA

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [ECON](#) [BM](#) [NLD](#)

SUBJECT: BURMA: DEMOCRATIC OPPOSITION SHOWS UNITY

Classified By: Poloff Dean Tidwell for Reasons 1.4 (b, d)

1. (U) SUMMARY: Burma's democratic opposition groups gathered in Rangoon to mark the country's National Day on November 25. Veteran politicians spoke with candor about the lack of basic freedoms, the deteriorating economic situation, and the continued detention of leading political prisoners. The chair of the Group of Veteran Politicians called for the formation of a National Reconciliation Coalition Government as the best way forward for Burma. End Summary.

2. (U) Pro-democracy parties and groups gathered in Rangoon on November 25 for Burma's 85th National Day, commemorating independence aspirations that appeared among Burmese students in the 1920. The Group of Veteran Politicians (GVP), an independent group of retired government and military officials, organized the program. The event attracted 350 pro-democracy advocates, including NLD leaders; members of the Committee to Represent the People's Parliamentarians (a grouping of MPs-elect); officers of ethnic parties; and Min Ko Naing and Ko Ko Gyi, leaders of "the Generation of Students Since 1988," a new group established by the former political prisoners and other colleagues. Poloff was the only foreign diplomat present at the function.

3. (U) The 90-year-old chairman of the GVP, Thakin Thein Pe, an original member of the independence movement and a former cabinet member in the U Nu government, delivered the keynote speech. He said, "Our people have lost their birthright" of basic human freedoms, including the right to free speech and to organize. He also stressed the current difficult economic situation, where ordinary people and civil servants alike struggle just to get enough to eat. He blamed the increase in consumer prices and deteriorating economic situation for a sharp rise in crime and illicit activities. He decried the worsening conditions in Burma reported by the United Nations in the area of human rights, trafficking in persons, use of child soldiers, and forced labor, and condemned the continued detention of Aung San Suu Kyi and other political prisoners.

4. (U) Thakin Thein Pe also called again on the GOB to solve the country's current problems by accepting the GVP's proposal, first made in 1999, for a National Reconciliation Coalition Government (NRCG). He stressed that the NRCG is compatible with the GOB's "road map." Key points of the proposal include:

-- A coalition government of the military and representatives of the NLD, SNLD, NUP, and various ethnic parties.

-- The military would comprise one-third of the cabinet.

-- Parliament could be convened on the basis of results from the 1990 election.

-- A comprehensive, general amnesty and pardon to all members of the regime would be granted for past misdeeds.

-- The NRCG would take responsibility for drafting the new constitution.

5. (U) The program proceeded smoothly, despite the presence of hordes of plainclothes security personnel, who wandered up and down the aisles throughout the function in a photographing frenzy. (Note: This is fairly standard GOB procedure at opposition-sponsored events. End Note.) The GOB security officials repeatedly photographed the same individuals from different angles in an obvious effort to intimidate them. One photographer rudely bumped poloff aside to shoot yet another photo.

6. (U) Later in the day the NLD held its own National Day function at its Rangoon headquarters with about 400 attendees. The NLD issued statements calling on the SPDC to implement its promises of national reconciliation by releasing NLD Vice Chairman Tin Oo and General Secretary Aung San Suu Kyi; releasing SNLD Chairman U Hkun Htun Oo and Secretary U Sai Nyunt Lwin; opening immediately closed NLD

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offices nationwide; and releasing all political prisoners and prisoners of conscience. There were no diplomats present because the NLD had intentionally chosen to not invite the diplomatic corps this year, instead using the opportunity to

target NLD party members.

17. (C) COMMENT: The GVP's plucky old politicians showed surprising bravery in their words, especially for a society that is used to being cowed by the heavy hand of the military regime. While the regime photographers are obviously paying attention to the activities of opposition politicians, it is doubtful the generals are listening to what they have to say.

These National Day events serve to remind party followers that a democratic opposition still exists in Burma, although it is growing older and receiving less attention with every passing year. End Comment.

STOLTZ